

producer's product over competing products that are also available. If different stands are set up to sell different products, the advertisements may influence the consumer to choose the producer's product simply because the wait in line for the producer's product will be more enjoyable than the wait in line for a competing product.

The present invention can also be used to distribute prizes or other incentives such as free drinks, brewery branded clothing, discounts, or public recognition. Because the present invention can track the number of beverages dispensed, the present invention can, for example, be used to award prizes to whoever purchases the 50th beer or the 100th root beer. Most preferably, the present invention broadcasts a particular slogan, sales pitch, or sound bite when a winner is selected, thereby drawing more attention to the vendor and the product.

Finally, the preferred providers of the specially equipped dispensers will be benefited by the apparatus and method of the present invention. Retailers will be driven to purchase or lease the specially equipped dispensers from the preferred providers by the desire for advertising revenues that will ultimately lower the cost of the dispenser. Consumer demand for the popular dispensers will also drive retailers to purchase or lease the specially equipped dispensers. In return, the preferred providers will sell more specially equipped dispensers.

The apparatus of the present invention can take a number of different forms. For example, the dispenser can incorporate one or more viewing or auditory devices connected to one or more output devices that supply the selected advertisements. The dispenser can trigger visual or audio messages to begin after or while a beverage is dispensed. A metering device is preferably coupled to the dispenser and preferably keeps track of how many beverages are sold while the advertisements are displayed. An optional counter can also or instead be used to track the time of day and the number of times each advertisement is displayed. The metering device can optionally track total beverage volume dispensed for desired time periods. Also, the metering device can be used to rotate the particular advertisements or messages. For example, after every twentieth beverage is dispensed the present invention can display a new advertisement.

The size and number of viewing and auditory devices can be selected to suit the venue in which the dispenser will be used. For example, in smaller bar or tavern applications, the dispenser can incorporate as few as one small viewing device built into or otherwise located near the dispenser. For larger applications, such as sporting events where the lines are often very long, the dispenser can incorporate multiple large-screen viewing devices that can be built into the dispenser, placed in selected locations along the line, and/or elevated above the line and the dispenser. These larger applications can also employ additional sound systems which can be connected to the output device to transmit an optional audio component of the advertisements. Hereinafter and in the appended claims, the term "display" means that the advertisement is presented (i.e., shown, exhibited, demonstrated, transmitted, or otherwise broadcast) visually, audibly, or both visually and audibly in whole or in part. Accordingly, the term "display" as used herein and in the appended claims does not necessarily refer to visual media.

The present invention addresses the problem of producers losing potential accounts due to the costs associated with buying or leasing recommended dispensing equipment. By providing the option of using a dispenser that is equipped to display advertisements, and thereby generate revenues, the producers can greatly offset or even eliminate the cost of the specialized dispensing equipment. Producers have an incentive to recommend these specially equipped dispensers to the retailers in order to take advantage of the excellent marketing opportunity of the public venue. Retailers have the incentive to purchase the specially equipped dispensers since the ultimate price can still be lower than less expensive standard dispensers and the consumer demand for these entertaining dispensers will be high.

Further objects and advantages of the present invention, together with the organization and manner of operation thereof, will become apparent from the following detailed description of the invention when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like elements have like numerals throughout the drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The present invention is further described with reference to the accompanying drawings, which show preferred embodiments of the present invention. However, it should be noted that the invention as disclosed in the accompanying drawings is illustrated by way of example only. The various elements and combinations of elements described below and illustrated in the drawings can be arranged and organized differently to result in embodiments that are still within the spirit and scope of the present invention.

In the drawings, wherein like reference numerals indicate like parts:

FIG. 1 is a schematic representation of an apparatus according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a schematic representation of an apparatus according to another preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 3 is a flow-chart illustrating a method according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

A preferred application in which the present invention can be used is shown in FIG. 1. In the illustrated embodiment, the beverage dispenser 10 is located in a public venue or retail outlet. As used herein and in the appended claims, the terms "public venue" and "retail outlet" mean any location where members of the public at large or select groups of the public at large would gather and have the opportunity to drink beverages dispensed from the beverage dispenser 10, including, but not limited to, restaurants, convenience stores, bars, taverns, arenas, stadiums, theaters, cafeterias, festivals, concert halls, public sporting or dining clubs, private sporting or dining clubs, casinos, parks, and various tourist attractions. The beverage dispenser 10 can be used to display advertisements to be viewed and/or heard by customers in or near the retail outlet. The beverage dispenser can also display live events, television programs, sporting events, concerts, scores, news, contests, or other forms of information or entertainment. Preferably, advertisements can be interspersed or incorporated into these other forms of